

10 January 1967

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Soviet Call for Civilian Volunteers for Vietnam

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1. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Moscow issued a call in early December for "civilian volunteers" for Vietnam. Specialists of all types were reportedly being sought, among them mechanics and truck drivers. [REDACTED]

25X1

2. The report rings true, but adds little to what was already suspected concerning Russian recruiting practices in sending both military and civilian technicians to Vietnam. There is every reason to believe that these--particularly the civilians--are selected on something resembling a volunteer basis. The North Vietnamese undoubtedly need help in the form of mechanics, maintenance specialists, and drivers. Although [REDACTED]

25X1

[REDACTED] this is the "first call" Moscow has issued for "civilian volunteers," there are certainly Soviets already doing this kind of work in North Vietnam. The report suggests a recently formalized program to establish a roster of personnel with appropriate talents for North Vietnam's current needs.

3. As far as can be determined, the number of Russians civilians assisting North Vietnam in various technical and advisory roles has remained fairly constant over recent months. It is estimated that no more than 1,000 Soviet civilian technicians are present in North Vietnam at the present time. It is likely that those who arrived during the past two years volunteered for service there. Despite increased military activity during that period, and the presence during that time of up to 1,500 military technicians,

25X1

-2-

25X1

4. Bloc pledges of readiness to send "volunteers" to Vietnam at Hanoi's request were conceived and issued for obvious purposes of political demonstration. From time to time Moscow has focused on the "volunteer" gesture as an earnest of its commitment to support North Vietnam. Talk, after all, is cheap, and the Soviets have already derived some propaganda mileage from exploitation of this issue.

5. The USSR has the option of further refining its pledge and conveying the impression that the sending of "volunteers" is under more urgent consideration. The Soviets are free to acknowledge more openly the full extent of the Russian presence in North Vietnam. Over recent months they have done just that. The Soviet press has become increasingly candid in calling public attention to specific forms of Russian assistance to Hanoi. Last year Moscow revealed that North Vietnamese military specialists had been schooled in training programs conducted in the USSR. More recently the Soviets have publicly alluded to the role of Russian military advisors and technicians within North Vietnam, who are advising and training anti-aircraft technicians and pilots.

6. This verbal escalation of the Soviet role in Vietnam has been introduced for political effect; it is designed both to undercut Chinese charges of Soviet treachery and cowardice, and to deter, if possible, further escalatory moves by the US. For similar purposes, and with Hanoi's prior concurrence, the USSR could readily take the next logical step by sending further increments of personnel to Vietnam, with appropriate fanfare, and openly call these "volunteers." Or it could, for example, declare technicians and advisors already

25X1

-3-

there "volunteers." * Either move would slightly raise the political level of Moscow's commitment to North Vietnam's defense. Any such tactic would elicit a predictable propaganda splash in headlines throughout the world, but would on balance have but marginal significance in terms of Moscow's role in the war. More open acknowledgement of Soviet involvement in defense of North Vietnam would not appreciably increase the risk of an open Soviet-US military confrontation.

7. There is, of course, no indication that the North Vietnamese at present either want or need openly declared "volunteers" for use in the South, nor is it likely that Hanoi will appeal for open volunteers for this purpose in the foreseeable future. In any event, Moscow has certainly not given Hanoi a blank check to be filled out when and as the North Vietnamese see fit. Should the Soviets be one day called upon to make good on their "volunteer" propaganda gesture, they could almost certainly handle the matter in such a way as to respond adequately, without substantially changing the character of the war or the extent of their own involvement in North Vietnam's defense.

* Shortly after the Warsaw Pact pledge last July "to allow volunteers to go to Vietnam," Moscow seemed to be preparing against all contingencies. A Soviet broadcast commenting on the Warsaw Pact statement explained that "the Fifth Hague convention of 1907 does not establish the responsibility of states for the fact that their citizens volunteer for service with one of the belligerents."

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25X1

Next 1 Page(s) In Document Exempt